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Celebrations, Concerns and Connection...

We welcome **Leslie Etheredge**, newly called as associate pastor to serve with Pastor **John Gill** on the staff of **Church of the Savior UCC, Knoxville**. Leslie's transfer of ministerial standing from the St. Louis Association of the Missouri Mid-South Conference was accepted on September 26.

Congratulations to **Andy Sidden**, pastor, and **Candace Chellew**, associate pastor of **Garden of Grace UCC, Columbia, SC**, on the occasion of their upcoming installations as ordained ministers of the United Church of Christ at Garden of Grace on October 18. Andy first was ordained by the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches and Candace by an independent congregation. They came to ordained ministerial standing through the newly implemented multiple paths to ministry of the UCC.

Jerry Gladson, recently retired UCC minister, announced the publication of his new book, *The Five Exotic Scrolls of the Hebrew Bible: The Prominence, Literary Structure, and Liturgical Significance of the Megilloth* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2009). This work is an advanced introduction to the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther. Jerry can arrange a discounted copy for anyone who emails him at Jerrygladson@aol.com. He currently is an adjunct professor at Columbia Theological Seminary.

Congratulations to **Christophe Ringer**, pastor of **Howard Congregational UCC, Nashville**, and Kim Peeler who will be married on Saturday, October 24 in Nashville.

At the recent fall meeting of the Alabama-Tennessee Association, which lifted up the global ministries of the United Church of Christ, members of **Pleasant Hill Community UCC, TN** were active as presenters of global ministries in the following settings: **Herb and Peg Muenstermann, India**; **Martha and Dick Lammers, Japan**; **Ted Braun, Cuba**; and **Connie and Bob Waidmann, Southeast Conference Disaster Assistance Relief Team (DART)**.

Paige Pearson, pastor of **United Church of Cookeville, UCC, TN**, is preparing for a six-week maternity leave beginning at the end of October.

Posted on October 2, 2009



Susan Mitchell, member of **Rush Memorial UCC, Atlanta**, announced that she has been called by Local Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ to serve as a capital campaign developer. Many will remember that Susan narrated the presentation on the campaign to expand the ministries of the Southeast Conference at our Annual Meeting. She will maintain her home in Atlanta.

Marlene Underwood, member of **Rush Memorial UCC** as well has started a PhD program at Drew University, and was honored to receive a Fund for Theological Fellowship Doctoral Fellowship and a UCC Adrienne and Shelby Rooks Scholarship.

Chris Glaser, interim minister at **Virginia Highland Church, Atlanta**, will read from and sign his new book, "As My Own Soul: The Blessing of Same Gender Marriage" (Seabury Press, 2009, ISBN 978-1-59627-118-0, \$20) Monday, September 28, 7:30 p.m. at Outwrite Bookstore and Coffeehouse, 991 Piedmont Ave. NE, Atlanta, See www.vhchurch.org for more info.

Marvin Morgan and **Ron Bonner**, both members of First Congregational UCC are serving as transitional ministers in ELCA congregations in Atlanta.

Jim Deming, pastor of **First United Church UCC, Nashville**, has written a



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chapter in a new book, *Love God Heal Earth*, on creation care and environmental stewardship. Jim joins writers from other faiths who express their call to the moral and spiritual crisis of global warming. The book may be ordered at the website www.theregenerationproject.org.

Paige Pearson, pastor of **United Church of Cookeville, UCC**, was installed as pastor at a service on July 26th. **Barbara Everett** was present representing the Alabama-Tennessee Association, and **Vanessa Robbs**, moderator of the Conference represented the Conference in the service.

Christophe Ringer, licensed as pastor of **Howard Congregational UCC**, Nashville has announced his intent to pursue ordination in the UCC. He has also announced his engagement to be married to Kim Peeler.

In August the Georgia-South Carolina Association approved **Andy Sidden**, and **Candace Chelley** pastor and associate pastor respectively of **Garden of Grace UCC, Columbia, SC**, to proceed to be installed as pastors authorized for ordained ministry by the United Church of Christ. In this act, the Association, Candace and Andy became pioneers in the implementation of the new multiple paths to ministry. They presented and discussed their portfolios organized around the marks for faithful and effective ministry.

We were saddened by the death June 14th of **Henry Coffey**, member of First UCC, Nashville, and a retired minister.

Linda White, Stated Supply Minister at **Brookmeade Congregations UCC, Nashville**, announced the death of her father in May. He was 102.

The father of **Hugh Hogan**, licensed for ministry at **Lanett Congregational Christian Church, AL**, passed away the last week of August.

Ted Breilsford, formerly a member of **Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta**, was ordained to serve Orchard Park Community Church in upstate New York, June 7th. **Tim Downs** was present to represent the Conference in the service. The preacher for the occasion was **Gail O'Day**, a member of **Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta**, and dean at the Candler School of Theology.

Southeast Conference at General Synod

Reflections from Tim Downs, Conference Minister

It sounds a little clinical to describe General Synod as "the biannual national gathering of the United Church of Christ", and fails to do justice to this event which is one part homecoming, one part witness, one part celebration, and part high school talent show. It is homecoming for friends from across the years and across the church as we find one another in the crowds. It is part witness as resolutions are passed, speeches made and people gather in workshop to connect and learn. It is part celebration in worship and music. It is part high school talent show, as I was reminded watching the national evangelism team wearing rabbit ears dancing on stage with a giant bunny, to celebrate church multiplication. At this General Synod there was the added measure of thanks and celebration surrounding General Minister John Thomas' completion of his nine years of service in that position. There were deeply touching testimony and thanks extended to John, who has been an exceptional leader in trying times, and a good friend to us in the Southeast Conference.

I was struck throughout by the numbers of visitors and leaders were present from the Southeast Conference at this General Synod, a source of great pride for me as your conference minister. Churches from across the Conference sent members, some of whom came as delegates, others as leaders, and others as visitors. Churches that were presented included **Holy Trinity Community UCC, , Howard Congregational UCC, both of Nashville, Pleasant Hill Community UCC, Tennessee, Pilgrim Congregational, UCC, Chattanooga, Garden of Grace UCC, Columbia, SC, Peace Congregational UCC, Clemson, SC, Pilgrimage UCC, Marietta, Victory Church, Stone Mountain, GA, Central Congregational UCC, and First Congregational UCC, both of Atlanta, First Congregational UCC, Birmingham, Trinity Congregational UCC, Athens, AL, and Bethany Congregational UCC, Thomasville, GA.**



There were many who served as significant leaders throughout the Synod. They included **Marvin Morgan, of First Congregational UCC, Atlanta**, who served as moderator of



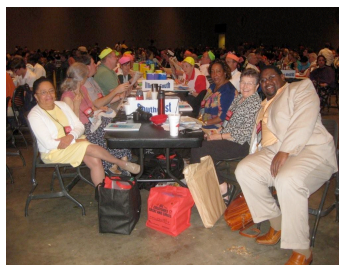
General Synod, **Elizabeth Clement** also of First, Atlanta, who served on the second governance Follow-up Task Force. **Gary Myers**, pastor of **Trinity Congregational UCC, Athens, AL**, served in significant leadership positions on both the Board of Wider Church Ministries, and the Executive Council. **Dorinda**

Broadnax Licensed to serve at **Community Congregational UCC**, in Montgomery, was the recipient of the Honored Lay Woman Award from the



Southeast Conference. Leading a committee in discussing a resolution to bring to the floor of General Synod was **Jeremy Rich**, licensed pastor of **Bethany Congregational UCC, Thomasville**. (Jeremy Rich Chairs Committee) **Jennifer Spears** of **Garden of Grace UCC, Columbia, SC**, led a workshop on issues faced by the transgendered community. Two of our conference staff, **Kathy Clark** and **Cameron Trimble** have been instrumental in the development of major initiatives in the

national setting- Kathy in the area of theological education and formation for ministry, and Cameron in the area of new church development. Certainly not least of our leadership is **Steve Sterner**, a member of **Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta**, and active in **Peace Congregational UCC, Clemson, SC**, who was reelected as Action Executive Minister of Local Church Ministries of the UCC. We in the Southeast Conference can be proud of those who serve our beloved UCC as a part of their ministry among us. Our delegates to



General Synod are also significant leaders for us. They include **Jim Crabb** of **Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta**, **Vanessa Robbs**, of **Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga**, **Dorothy Gager**, of **Howard Congregational UCC, Nashville**, **Bette Graves Thomas** of **First Congregational UCC, Atlanta**, **Jeanne Elrod**, of **Pleasant Hill Community UCC, TN**, and **Jeremy Rich** of **Bethany**

Congregational UCC, Thomasville, GA. (Picture of SEC Delegates) It is not accidental that we have such a significant presence in the national setting. It represent the fruits of our hard work in cultivating and encouraging leadership over the years through the TAP program, our engagement with seminaries, the clarity of our commitment as a conference to the United Church of Christ, and the excellence of our staff.

While there are many highlights to the General Synod, I would lift up a few that have a particular impact on the life of our conference. The first was the Sacred Conversations, which were held to foster dialogue about race and racism. We are uniquely equipped to engage in these conversations as a conference which is majority African-American, and a setting where race and racism have been a part of our identity from our inception. We were present and active through these conversations. The changes to the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ to encourage multiple paths for people preparing for ministry in the UCC will have a strong and positive impact on our congregations over the next decades. The vote of General Synod to proceed with the conversation toward a "single structure governance", while not the stuff of headlines, I believe will significantly improve our capacity for effective ministry and mission across the UCC.

I remain encouraged by the leadership of the United Church of Christ. I was touched by the grace, humility and humor that marked the recognition of John Thomas' presidency, and appreciated his words to us to "swim bravely, swim safely, and relax into the buoyancy of grace". The election of Geoffrey Black as General Minister and President is significant for many reasons. He brings to us the perspectives and gifts that come of having served as a local church pastor, on the national staff, and as a conference minister for nine years in New York. He brings to us a spirit of hope and a strong reaffirmation of our identity as a people seeking peace and justice. It is our hope to have him in our Conference soon.

Comments from Southeast Conference Members Who Attended General Synod:

From Juanita Jackson (Bethany Congregational UCC, Thomasville, GA):

"In addition to the inspirational worship experiences, the hearings, the conversation on race and being immersed in all aspects of the 27th Synod, seeing former acquaintances was a special blessing. Being with the delegates and visitors from the Southeast Conference was wonderful!"

From David Harsh (Pleasant Hill Congregational UCC, TN):

"The one thing that I will remember about General Synod 27 is the gracious exit of John Thomas as he completes his work as the leader of the church. His worship message was excellent and the times he spoke in the plenary session you could feel the compassion he has for the United Church of Christ and the work that he has done for the last 10 years."

From Bette Graves Thomas (First Congregational UCC, Atlanta):

"I took great pride in watching my church member and friend, Marvin L. Morgan, moderate at the Synod. I remember when Marvin was elected to this post in Hartford and was so excited. He, along with the assistant moderators, did a great job even when there were protests on the floor. Congratulations Marvin!"

"I experienced some sadness in knowing that this was the last Synod for John Thomas. I had come to respect him greatly. He was so knowledgeable and yet so down to earth. Each year when I requested a letter of greetings from him (at the last minute) for our church's anniversary he always came through."

"There were many highlights in at the Synod. My most memorable worship service would be when Rev. Otis Moss, III preached. I enjoyed his thought provoking sermon on "punctuation". My greatest learning experience was at a workshop by Jennifer Spears. While I have been told that I am **straight but not narrow**, Jennifer helped me to understand the world of LGBT. I felt that I had made a new friend in Jennifer and enjoyed talking with her."

From Forenza Chatmon (Bethany Congregational UCC, Thomasville, GA):

"When the 27th General Synod, delegates, ministers and visitors came together, in the middle of diversity, respect, excitement, crying, shuffling, and awesome hospitality it was an electrifying experience! Many wonderful things happened when this assembly of UCC converged in a week of meetings in Grand Rapids, which was interesting, informative and revealing."

"One could feel the warm mesmerizing and sometimes magical spirit. It was expressed through the hospitality, friendships, intense bible studies, informative workshops, inspiring dances, music and sermons, interesting candidates, well organized business sessions and committee hearings, displays and exhibits, fellowship, and lots of cookies to my delight!"

...And General Synod XXVIII, 2011 will be in our neighboring Florida Conference, in Tampa!

If there is news that you wish to have shared with others in the Southeast Conference family, please contact Tim at tdowns@seucc.org.

Posted on September 14, 2009

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